United Nations S/PV.6060

Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

6060th meeting

Wednesday, 31 December 2008, 6.40 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Jurica	(Croatia)
Members:	Belgium	Mrs. Detaille
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafondo
	China	Mr. Zhang Yesui
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	France	Mr. Ripert
	Indonesia	Mr. Natalegawa
	Italy	Mr. Terzi di Sant'Agata
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Ettalhi
	Panama	Mr. Suescum
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	South Africa	Mr. Kumalo
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir John Sawers
	United States of America	Mr. Khalilzad
	Viet Nam	Mr. Bui The Giang

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Letter dated 31 December 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2008/842)

Letter dated 31 December 2008 from the Permanent Representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2008/843)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

08-67507 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 6.40 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Letter dated 31 December 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2008/842)

Letter dated 31 December 2008 from the Permanent Representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2008/843)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Egypt and Israel in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Ms. Shalev (Israel) took a seat at the Council table; Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) took the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 31 December 2008 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2008/844, and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Council that will be held on Wednesday, 31 December 2008, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Mansour (Palestine) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 31 December 2008 from the Permanent Mission of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations, in which it is requested that the Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Yahya Mahmassani, be invited to participate in the consideration of the item, in accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to His Excellency Mr. Yahya Mahmassani.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Mahmassani to take the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The Security Council is meeting in response to two letters dated 31 December 2008 from, respectively, the Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Permanent Representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, which will be issued as documents S/2008/842 and S/2008/843.

I should also like to draw the attention of Council members to a letter dated 31 December 2008 from the Permanent Representative of France, transmitting a statement by the European Union on the situation in the Middle East, which will be issued as document S/2008/841.

I welcome the presence of the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and I give him the floor.

The Secretary-General: A dramatic crisis in Gaza and southern Israel has now reached its fifth day.

The civilian population, the fabric of Gaza, the future of the peace process, stability in the region and goodwill among people throughout the world: all are trapped between the irresponsibility displayed in the indiscriminate rocket attacks by Hamas militants and the disproportionality of the continuing Israeli military operation. We will be further threatened if the conflict continues or escalates to a new phase of deadly violence.

I am profoundly troubled that the call of this Council, issued nearly four days ago, for an end to the violence has gone unheeded. I wish to underline in the strongest possible terms the world's call for an immediate ceasefire that is fully respected by all parties. This must be achieved now. The parties must step back from the brink. All this violence must end.

As a result of the crisis and the violence, conditions for 1.5 million people in Gaza today are nothing short of terrifying. The people of Gaza are living under heavy bombardment, which has targeted Hamas facilities, smuggling tunnels and other Hamas infrastructure, as well as the former Palestinian Authority security structure, government buildings, residential homes, mosques and businesses. More than 300 people lie dead, among them at least 60 women and children. Over 800 are wounded.

In southern Israel, there has been a continuous stream of rockets fired from Gaza by Palestinian militants. Longer-range rockets have been used by militants, hitting major Israeli cities, with hundreds of thousands of people now in range. Four Israelis have died since Saturday and over 30 more have been injured. Schools have closed and daily life in southern Israel is extremely difficult, as Israelis live in constant fear of rockets, which have hit homes and schools.

Let me be clear: I condemn unequivocally and in the strongest possible terms the ongoing rocket and mortar attacks by Hamas and other Palestinian militants. But I also condemn the excessive use of force by Israel. All parties must fully uphold international humanitarian law. It is the civilian populations that are bearing the brunt of this escalation, and there must be swift and decisive action by the international community to bring to an end their suffering.

All parties must address the serious humanitarian and economic needs in Gaza and take necessary measures to ensure the continuous provision of humanitarian supplies. Without the violence stopping, it is extremely difficult to get food to people who need it. It is too dangerous for civilians to leave their homes to seek urgent medical treatment, buy supplies and assist people in distress. Conditions for parents and children in Gaza are dangerous and frightening.

I wish to pay tribute to United Nations staff in the area, who are working hard under deeply adverse conditions to address urgently the humanitarian situation of Gazans. I am pained at the death, injury and damage that United Nations personnel and premises, as well as others associated with our programmes, have sustained.

I also pay tribute to the efforts of donor countries which have come forward and pledged their support.

Pursuant to assurances given to me by Prime Minister Olmert and Foreign Minister Livni of Israel and the continuing close cooperation between United Nations agencies and Israeli authorities on the ground, some humanitarian aid is passing through the Kerem Shalom crossing. Today, a total of 84 truckloads, including 34 for humanitarian aid agencies, entered Gaza. As a result, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is opening seven emergency distribution centres with a skeleton staff to distribute recently donated wheat flour starting tomorrow.

However, the Karni crossing and the Karni conveyor belt, which UNRWA urgently requires to open to bring in wheat grain supplies, remain closed, as do the Nahal Oz fuel pipelines. There remains a shortage of wheat grain, which exacerbates a shortage of bread in a situation in which two thirds of Gaza's population were already reliant on some kind of food aid prior to this escalation. Fuel shortages have led to the closure of the Gaza power plant and power shortages for up to 16 hours a day. To address the shortages of food and fuel, the Nahal Oz and Karni crossings must be opened. Unless there is an immediate end to the violence, the humanitarian situation will deteriorate significantly.

I urge all members of the international community, in particular those in the region, to exert what influence they have on the parties to end this violence now. Yesterday, at the Quartet meeting, I stressed the need for decisive action. I welcome the efforts under way, including by Arab and European

leaders. But I must repeat: not enough has been done, and more is urgently required.

There must be an immediate ceasefire that is fully respected by all parties. This must create new conditions on the ground that ensure at last that crossings into Gaza will be reopened, that rocket attacks and weapons smuggling will end, that we will pursue political dialogue, and only political dialogue, to reunite Gaza with the West Bank, and that the root cause of this suffering — the absence of Israeli-Palestinian peace — is ended.

Even as this crisis rages, let us never forget the underlying issue: there must be an end to occupation, an end to conflict and the creation of a Palestinian State. Let us not lose sight of our goal: two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region, based on Security Council resolutions Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008), the principle of land for peace, the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative. This conflict must end, and it must end once and for all.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Mr. President, and the other members of the Security Council for responding positively, by convening this meeting, to the request by the Group of Arab States and the sisterly country of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. I also thank the Secretary-General for his presence and for the important statement he has just made.

For the fifth consecutive day, Israeli military aggression continues against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. As I address the Council, the Palestinian people — the elderly, children and women — are facing a criminal military campaign that has claimed the lives of more than 380 people and injured more than 1,800 others, not to mention innocent women and children who have fallen victim while asleep in their homes.

We are at a very dangerous crossroads in the Middle East as a direct consequence of this Israeli aggression, which daily increases in ferocity, which threatens the lives and prosperity of 1.5 million Palestinian, and which threatens to undermine peace efforts. It is of the utmost importance that decisions be taken immediately by all actors, in particular the Security Council, which bears responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Such decisions must restore the reason, calm and stability that are necessary to make peace. The alternative is a more deeply entrenched cycle of violence, destruction and killing, a cycle that has many times brought tragedy to our peoples and that, if not halted, will definitely lead to the destruction of our hopes for peace.

Despite the momentum generated by the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1850 (2008), Israel, the occupying Power — instead of opening a new page and continuing on the road of peace, and in blatant and flagrant violation of the norms of international law — began its brutal aggression on 27 December. Israeli military aircraft — F-16 fighters and Apache helicopters — have dropped hundreds of bombs on numerous sites in Gaza. Israel continues to defy appeals from every corner of the world — including the statement issued by the Security Council on 28 December; the repeated appeals of the Secretary-General, including the appeal he made this evening; and the appeal of the Quartet — that it cease its aggression, which has been condemned and which threatens to claim more lives and plunges the region into a cycle of violence and hatred. And Israel continues to kill, paying no heed to any appeals and trampling on every human value and every norm of international law.

What we are seeing today is the realization of the repeated threats made by several Israeli officials over the past few months. They threatened to launch broad military attacks against the Palestinian people in Gaza, which is under Israeli occupation. Those threats have now been fulfilled in the military aggression launched by the occupying Power, killing innocent civilians.

Those threats and the ongoing attacks must be taken very seriously. They must be condemned, and they must be stopped immediately by all available means. That requires immediate measures by the international community, including the Security Council.

Under the guise of withdrawing from the Gaza Strip, Israel tightened its siege of the Strip and imposed

a policy of collective punishment of Palestinians in Gaza. From the beginning of 2008 it continued to use brute force — excessive force — against the population, further exacerbating the humanitarian situation. Weeks before the most recent campaign, Israel crippled all spheres of activity in Gaza, notably the medical services, and prevented international and other humanitarian agencies, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), from bringing aid into Gaza. Israel has made absolutely no response to reports from the United Nations, from United Nations agencies on the ground and from Mr. Robert Serry warning of the disastrous consequences of this irresponsible policy. Everybody has confirmed those reports: that the unprecedented closure of the Gaza crossings is causing an unacceptable disaster for the civilian population.

UNRWA has had to cease the distribution of aid to 800,000 people, resulting in dire shortages of food, fuel, electricity and water throughout Gaza. Infrastructure construction projects, including those initiated by the United Nations, have come to a halt for lack of materials. Those are but a few illustrations of the hunger and despair that have been imposed on the Palestinians in Gaza for an entire year. Let me provide some additional tragic details to illustrate life in Gaza.

Gaza's tragedy did not begin today; it has been taking place for a long time. Throughout that time, we have come to the Security Council time and again to warn of imminent aggression and of the fact that Israel's siege would lead to a disaster. We asked the Council to adopt practical steps to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to halt its policy of collective punishment against the civilian population of Gaza. But the Council took no serious measures to stop Israel. Prior to the commencement of the current aggression, the situation in Gaza was on the verge of becoming a genuine humanitarian disaster.

As can be seen on television screens, we now face that disaster. Live broadcasts include images of children killed in their beds, decimated families and human organs retrieved from underground. Allow me to repeat what I have already said: there is absolutely no justification for such criminal acts or for the immoral and illegal collective punishment of an entire people.

The Israeli side has publicly rejected the Council's appeals for a halt to the aggression. It has also rejected every appeal by the leaders of the world and is continuing its aggression. All of that is in defiance of the Security Council, international law and international humanitarian law. The question now is: What does the Council intend to do? We believe that the Council must adopt a binding resolution that condemns Israel's crimes, ends the military aggression, provides protection for the Palestinians, lifts the siege and ensures a lasting ceasefire. We would like the Council to consider and adopt the draft resolution that my brother from Libya will introduce shortly.

There must be an immediate ceasefire, and international protection must be provided for our people in Gaza, which is the only way genuinely to ensure respect for a ceasefire and to calm the situation. The international community, the Quartet and the Secretary-General have repeatedly expressed their views on this disaster and have called for an end to the aggression. They have done so in line with their moral and political responsibility. We pay tribute to their appeals and urge the Council to respond to them positively by adopting the draft resolution.

The Council's failure to express its view with regard to this situation and to play its Charter role to address an issue of such centrality to the maintenance of international peace and security would result in enormous damage to its credibility and deprive us of its contribution, at the expense of innocent victims and the collective efforts to end the aggression. Once again, the peace process and developments on the ground are both linked and mutually reinforcing. Negative developments only serve to undermine efforts to achieve peace.

In conclusion, mothers and children in the Gaza Strip are today looking towards the Council to halt this barbaric aggression and to protect them from criminality, deliberate starvation and killing. We hope that the Council will not let them down. We hope that their fate will not be that of the five brothers in Jabalia or the martyred Hamdan children — Lama, five years old; Haya, 12 years old; and Ismail, also 12 years of age — or of the other 60 martyred children.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Ms. Shalev (Israel): Last Saturday, Israel launched a military operation aimed at protecting

Israelis living in southern Israel from the incessant barrage of rocket and mortar shell fire. Israel was compelled to resort to a military operation after many weeks — indeed, months and years — during which its civilians were subjected to deliberate terrorist attacks carried out by Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist organizations operating from the Gaza Strip. Israel demonstrated the utmost restraint before launching that operation, but there comes a time when a sovereign and responsible Government must take decisive action to protect its citizens and send a clear message to the Hamas terrorists: enough is enough.

In the past two weeks, prior to Israel's reaction, we witnessed a steep escalation in Hamas attacks against Israel. Israel has been subjected to more than 300 rockets and mortar shells, which were launched indiscriminately, striking cities and towns, schools and playgrounds, commercial centres and synagogues. In its military operation Israel has exercised its inherent right to self-defence, which is enshrined in Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. Any other State would have acted in the same manner when faced with similar terrorist threats.

No sovereign State would allow more than half a million people to constantly be held hostage by a terrorist organization. No sovereign State would allow its citizens to become the target of thousands of rockets and mortar shells. A mother sending her children to school must know that they will come back safely. No person should fear leaving his house because he may have to scramble for cover. No construction worker should fear dying while earning his living, as we witnessed just two days ago. Israel cannot, and will not, allow its citizens to be sitting ducks for terrorist attacks. Israel will continue to take all necessary measures to protect its citizens and stop terrorism.

Members of the Council must ask themselves what they would do in the same situation if their citizens were terrorized on a daily basis. Protecting the lives and well-being of one's citizens is not only a right, but also a responsibility of every sovereign State. With its military operation, the State of Israel is fulfilling that responsibility.

Let us all remind ourselves what Hamas is all about. Hamas is a terrorist organization that promotes a radical agenda of hatred and violence. It is supported financially and militarily by Iran and other extreme forces in our region. Ideologically, is tightly connected to Al-Qaida. It does not recognize Israel and calls in its charter for Israel's destruction. Hamas rejects peace in the Middle East. Like other terrorist organizations, Hamas strives to achieve its political goals by targeting innocent men, women and children, without hesitating to use its own population as a human shield. Hamas controls Gaza not through democratic means, but through violence and force against its political rivals.

It is regrettable that the Palestinian observer failed to mention Hamas, an organization that declared war on its own people and that holds them hostage.

Hamas stands against the very principles and purposes which the United Nations was founded upon and seeks to promote. It stands against any peaceful solution for the conflicts in our region.

Let me be very clear. The targets of this operation are the terrorists and their infrastructure alone. We are not at war with the Palestinian people, but with Hamas and other terrorist groups in Gaza. As such, we are doing our utmost to minimize civilian casualties. Hamas, on the other hand, places civilians in the line of fire, carrying out its activities from densely populated areas, and directs its attacks towards Israeli civilian targets. The current operation has exposed once again the fact that Hamas stores weapons and explosives in homes, schools, mosques and hospitals. It is Hamas that bears the sole responsibility for the current escalation and for any civilian casualties, Israelis and Palestinians alike.

While determined to protect the lives of its citizens, Israel continues to ensure passage of humanitarian goods and supplies to the people of Gaza. As Prime Minister Olmert emphasized at the outset of the military operation, we will make every possible effort to avoid any humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The people of Gaza do not deserve to suffer because of the killers and murderers of the terrorist organizations. Since the operation commenced, more than 350 trucks loaded with food and medical supplies have entered Gaza. As we speak, supplies and donations continue to flow into Gaza from international organizations and State donors.

At the same time, Hamas continues to target crossings and to obstruct the provision of humanitarian relief to the Palestinian people.

Our region is facing crucial times that will shape its future. The international community must reject the

agenda of the extremists and support that of the moderates calling for coexistence and the realization of two States living side by side in peace and security.

Only two weeks ago, the Security Council adopted resolution 1850 (2008), reaffirming the Annapolis process. Israel, for its part, will continue its efforts to pursue peace with the Palestinian people and its moderate leadership, while taking all necessary measures to protect its citizens from terrorism.

The President: I shall now give the floor to members of the Council.

Mr. Ettalhi (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this emergency meeting. My thanks go also to His Excellency the Secretary-General for his presence and for his statement.

Once again, we had wished that the people of the entire world without exception could be enjoying days of peace and calm at this time commemorating the birth of Jesus, the prophet of love, tolerance and peace. But others had a different view.

As everyone knows, the Gaza Strip is under siege and has been the target of Israeli military aggression since mid-2007. A truce between the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the Israelis was agreed upon last June, under the sponsorship of Egypt. In it, both parties committed themselves to halting violence of all kinds, and the Israelis pledged to end the siege, open the crossings and restore the situation to the pre-June 2007 status.

Everyone knows, and neutral observers agree, that the Palestinians religiously observed the truce, in spite of the fact that the Israelis violated it at least 190 times and, during this period, killed more than 25 inhabitants of Gaza. They never opened the crossings or lifted the siege, except partially. Indeed, they prevented many civilian goods from being delivered to the Strip. On 4 November 2008, the Israeli army penetrated well into the eastern part of Gaza, without provocation. In the course of that incursion, the Israelis killed six Palestinians in yet another violation of the truce. What, then, could be expected? Of course, it is normal that the Palestinians would react.

I can confirm that from that date the Palestinians never fired a single bullet except in response to an Israeli violation of the truce. Since 5 November, the Israelis have imposed a total land, sea and air blockade on Gaza. This has even extended to the humanitarian assistance provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), in clear defiance of resolution 1674 (2006) and the Fourth Geneva Convention. The Israeli authorities prevented UNRWA trucks from entering the Gaza Strip, forcing the Agency to suspend deliveries of basic commodities and food. Everybody knows — and this is nothing new — that half of the Gaza population live on that aid: more than 750,000 Gazans depend on it. What, then, does it mean to block that aid? It can have only one outcome: the imposition of hunger and starvation on the Palestinians. And what will that lead to?

These practices, in themselves, constitute a crime of genocide, a crime against humanity and a war crime under articles 6 (c), 7 (b) and 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. If any Council member harbours any doubt about that, I will gladly read out the text of those articles.

At the Council meeting held on 18 December (see S/PV.6049), my delegation spoke of the outcome of the blockade: complete paralysis of all activity. Even grain mills and bakeries cannot operate, and 80 per cent of Palestinian families are not merely living beneath the poverty line but are suffering from hunger. There has been a complete collapse of water and sewage services. Water is life. Water supply stations are inoperable, and Gazans have access to clean water only once a week: that is according to the United Nations. Sewage processing plants have stopped working, with sewage inundating entire municipalities. Supplies of medicine have been nearly exhausted: as members must be aware, United Nations officials have stated that 150 basic medicines no longer exist in Gaza. And the Council is well aware that, as a result of the blockade, more than 400 Palestinians have died because of a lack of access to medical treatment outside the Strip. Members also know that an electrical power station that meets 50 per cent of the needs of the Strip has shut down almost completely.

The long list of facts is known to everyone; I need not recite it item by item. This has been carried out with the full knowledge of the Council, which, despite the assessments of United Nations officials, unfortunately never lifted a finger. I ask members: what do you expect from people living under such conditions? The fact that the Council made no move encouraged the occupation authorities to do what they

have been doing since 27 December: conducting extensive aerial and naval bombardments with Israel's most modern and sophisticated weaponry.

All of that led to this horrible massacre, a heinous crime that thus far has left 400 dead and 2,000 wounded, most of them civilians, including large numbers of children. The attacks have utterly destroyed civilian buildings, homes, schools, mosques, governmental buildings and an already fragile infrastructure.

On the night of 27 December, the Security Council met. The meeting was not public, and the Council could agree only on a press statement that called for an immediate halt to all military activities and for the opening of border crossings. What we expected to occur happened, and it was nothing new. The Israelis refused to respond, despite appeals by the Secretary-General, the Quartet, the European Union and many countries. Indeed, Israeli officials stated that this was only the beginning — that they would expand the attacks. They massed their ground forces on the borders of Gaza and continued killing and besieging the citizens of Gaza. And that is what led the Arab foreign ministers to request the Arab representative in the Council to call for today's meeting.

Unfortunately, the Israelis have proved once again that they are interested not in peace, but in seizing land and terrorizing Palestinians and expelling them from their homes by every possible means, including killing and starvation. As we have said many times before, Israel's actions are essentially part of a very direct approach whose results are known to all. And I reiterate that what Israel they did on 27 December was precisely the response that they were expected to make to resolution 1850 (2008) adopted by the Council earlier this month. How can all Israeli practices on the ground be ignored? How could the force used by the Israelis be more excessive? How could there be greater disregard for international human rights and humanitarian law than that displayed by the Israelis through their actions in the besieged, starved and impoverished Gaza Strip?

We have prepared a draft resolution, and I have requested the Secretariat to circulate the text. Very briefly, it includes the following elements. First, it strongly condemns the Israeli military attacks, which have resulted in the deaths or injury of thousands of civilians. Second, it calls upon Israel to immediately cease its military attacks and to scrupulously abide by its obligations, as the occupying Power, under international law. Third, it calls for the immediate provision of protection for the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip in accordance with resolution 1674 (2006). Fourth, it calls also on Israel for an immediate and sustained opening of the Gaza Strip's border crossings to allow for the unrestricted and unhindered access of humanitarian aid and basic supplies. Fifth, it calls for immediate measures to be undertaken by all members of the international community to address the severe humanitarian crisis and the economic needs of the civilian population in the Gaza Strip. Sixth, it stresses the need for restoration of calm in full, in order to pave the way for resolving all issues in a peaceful manner. And seventh, it requests the Secretary-General, in the light of the urgency of the matter, to follow up on the implementation of the resolution.

In conclusion, I appeal to the Council to swiftly adopt a binding measure so that another Srebrenica or Rwanda is not added to its history.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): We thank you, Mr. President, for holding this emergency meeting this evening. The presence of the Secretary-General at this meeting is a clear indication of how dire the situation is in the Gaza Strip. The violence over the past few days in Gaza and in southern Israel has worsened to such an extent that many innocent civilians have been killed or injured. That makes it imperative that the Security Council, which is entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security, publicly voice its condemnation of the attacks and demand that they cease immediately.

Four days ago, the Council, in a rare moment of unity on issues related to the Middle East, issued a press statement expressing serious concern at the escalation of the situation in Gaza and calling for an immediate halt to all military activities and violence. The Council also called for all parties to address the serious humanitarian and economic needs in Gaza and to take necessary measures, including the opening of border crossings, to ensure the continuous provision of humanitarian supplies, including supplies of food and fuel, and the provision of medical treatment. We are disappointed that this call by the Council has yet to be heeded.

The South African Government has expressed its view that the Israeli air strikes using the most sophisticated war machinery, such as F-16 planes, are a violation of international humanitarian law. My Government has formally called on the Israeli Government to stop the military onslaught in Gaza and to immediately and unconditionally withdraw its forces that are currently massing on the border of Gaza.

The Israeli air strikes represent a disproportionate use of force by Israel. There have been almost 400 deaths, and hundreds more have already been injured. We join the Secretary-General in reiterating Israel's obligation to uphold international humanitarian and human rights law, and we condemn the excessive use of force, which is leading to the killing and injuring of civilians.

We recognize the legitimate security concerns of Israel resulting from rocket attacks. However, we do not believe that Israel's right to self-defence entitles it to violate the rights of innocent civilians, particularly those civilians who have been living under 40 years of foreign occupation.

We are further disappointed that the Israeli Government has rejected international calls for a 48-hour ceasefire in Gaza that would have allowed humanitarian aid to go into an area which has been besieged by an illegal blockade for many, many months. Israel cannot expect security for its people and political normalcy as long as it occupies Palestinian lands and continues its attempt to impose permanent rule over Palestinians through the use of military force.

The South African President has said in a public statement on this matter that violence and counter-violence will advance neither the cause of Israelis nor that of the Palestinians and that thus neither strength nor effort must be spared by the Palestinians and the Israelis in an effort to find an amicable solution, which can only result in two States living side by side and in peace.

The Security Council should again demand an end to both the Israeli attacks and the rocket attacks. To do less would again call into question the credibility of the Council in addressing the loss of innocent lives in the Middle East. Avoiding action is no longer an option for the Council.

It is for this reason that we fully support the draft resolution that has been presented by the delegation of Libya and hope that the Council will consider it in the coming days. The draft resolution calls for three basic things: the ending of the bombardment of Gaza; a ceasefire; and the protection of innocent Palestinian civilians. That is the least that this Council can do.

Mr. Ripert (France) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his presence and for his statement.

My delegation reiterates its extreme concern at the escalation of violence in southern Israel and the Gaza Strip. As the President of the French Republic declared three days ago after his meeting with the head of the Palestinian Authority, France reiterates its strong condemnation of the provocations that led to this situation, as well as the disproportionate use of force, and calls for an immediate halt in the launching of rockets into Israel as well as the Israeli bombardment of Gaza.

France deplores the significant civilian losses and expresses its condolence to the innocent victims and their families. France reiterates its position that international humanitarian law must be fully respected by all parties in all circumstances, as must the obligations based on that law with respect to the uninterrupted flow of humanitarian goods to the population and free access for international and humanitarian organizations. France recalls the importance of the opening of border crossings, in accordance with the Agreement on Movement and Access.

There can be no military solution to this situation. Everything must be done to find a political solution. The commitment of the international community is essential, in particular through the Security Council. In this regard, France reiterates the importance of the unanimous call for an immediate end to the violence made by the Council on 28 December and of resolution 1850 (2008). We also underline the importance of the message of the Quartet.

Confronted by the seriousness of ongoing events and the suffering of civilian populations, the priority is now to bring an end to the chain of violence, to permit the provision of assistance to the victims without delay and to ensure a return to a lasting truce and a political solution. In this regard, France expresses its full support for the initiative proposed yesterday in Paris by the European Union, whose main principles I should like to recall. First, there must be an immediate and

permanent ceasefire: the launching of rockets by Hamas into Israel must cease unconditionally; Israeli military action must stop. Also, there must be immediate humanitarian mobilization to meet the needs of the population of Gaza. The halting of fighting should also make possible the lasting opening of all border crossings. The European Union is prepared to resume its assistance role at Gaza border crossings, which must remain open. Thirdly, peace negotiations must be resumed and intensified. Continued negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government, in accordance with Security Council resolutions, are the only solution to this conflict.

The French authorities are mobilized and remain in contact with the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority, as well as with our European Union partners, the other members of the Security Council, the League of Arab States and the Secretary-General in order to consider means to bring an end to the violence as quickly as possible, to effect the best response to the humanitarian situation and to resume without delay the search for a lasting political solution. To that end, the President of the French Republic will travel to the region in the coming days and the European Union will send a ministerial mission.

Mr. Suescum (Panama) (spoke in Spanish): At the outset, I should like to acknowledge the presence of the Secretary-General and the representatives of Israel and Palestine and to thank them for their respective statements.

Panama would like once again to express our profound dismay at the situation to which the population of Gaza is being subjected. We deplore the breaking of the ceasefire and we call upon both Israel and Hamas to immediately and unconditionally cease violence, to take the necessary measures to avoid civilian casualties and to allow the unrestricted provision of medical and humanitarian aid.

Panama acknowledges the efforts made by a number of regional actors — in particular Egypt, the League of Arab States and the Palestinian Authority — in striving to resolve the crisis. We also commend France, both in its national capacity and as current President of the European Union, and Brazil for their initiatives. We endorse the statements made by both: that only a renewed ceasefire can open the way to establishing minimally acceptable conditions for the people of Gaza, and that only continued political negotiations between the Palestinian factions and between Israel and a Palestinian Authority that is negotiating on behalf of all Palestinians, can bring a lasting solution to this conflict.

Finally, we stress the absolute need to speedily resolve the underlying causes of the situation in the Middle East. Here, we reaffirm Panama's great concern about the fact that the Security Council — which bears primary responsible for maintenance of international peace and security — is on the margins of this process. In this case in particular, some States members of the Council that support one party or the other do so unconditionally, without the necessary distance from the specifics of the actions or decisions taken by the parties. As a consequence, it seems to us that the Council possesses neither the will nor the capacity to promote an understanding that can help reach a peaceful solution. In the light of that incapacity, peace initiatives come and go without significant impact.

Panama calls upon the Council and its members to shoulder our Charter responsibility and make a serious effort to understand the causes and, especially, the effects of the conflict at the international level, and to promote and follow up approaches and solutions leading to peace.

Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia): Thank you, Mr. President, for convening this emergency meeting of the Security Council. We also very much appreciate the presence of the Secretary-General and the statement he made earlier this evening.

My delegation would like to begin by expressing, in the clearest manner possible, its outrage at and strong condemnation of the continued military onslaught by Israel in the Gaza Strip. For days now, we have all been witness to the excessive and disproportionate use of force by Israel and the collective punishment of innocent civilians in contravention of international law, including the Geneva Conventions. One and a half million Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip are living in a state of constant fear. Innocent civilians, including women and children, have been killed and injured. International humanitarian workers risk death and injury as they carry on their vital mission.

We must not allow this situation to continue. The violence must end, and it must end now.

At this critical juncture, there should be no lack of clarity about what needs to happen. Israel must immediately end its attacks against innocent civilians in the Gaza Strip and comply with international humanitarian and human rights law. There is a need to cease hostilities and put to an end the cycle of violence.

The continuing violence in the Gaza Strip can only worsen the already dire humanitarian situation there. Civilians in Gaza have been suffering as the illegal blockade and the closure of the Gaza crossings by Israeli authorities continue. We are aware that at some points Israel has allowed humanitarian assistance to enter Gaza. However, we believe that humanitarian access should be provided continuously and permanently order to achieve tangible improvement of the humanitarian situation in Gaza. We therefore once again call on Israel to immediately lift the blockade and the closure.

My delegation also underlines that movement of persons, including humanitarian workers, and goods into Gaza should be immediately normalized in order to facilitate economic activity and to meet humanitarian needs.

The continued provision of emergency and humanitarian assistance by the international community to the Palestinian people in Gaza remains critical. In this regard, we commend the United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and other humanitarian organizations for their work in the Gaza Strip.

To help ease the suffering of the Palestinian people in Gaza, Indonesia will send humanitarian assistance in the amount of $1 million.

Indonesia commends the Secretary-General for his personal engagement on the unfolding crisis in the Gaza Strip. In this regard, we welcome the intensive efforts that the Secretary-General is making with all parties concerned in order to end the violence and restore calm.

Indonesia also recognizes the important role that countries in the region, individually or collectively through the League of Arab States, can play in promoting peace in the region. We welcome, therefore, the convening of the meeting of Foreign Ministers of the League of Arab States in Cairo earlier today to contribute constructively to the response to the ongoing crisis in the Gaza Strip. We believe that the Quartet also has an important role to play. Not least, the Security Council is called upon to remain seized of the unfolding crisis.

The Council's call in its statement of 28 December 2008 remains unheeded by Israel. Thus, the Security Council should consider the possibility of pursuing stronger measures to end all violence and military activities and to restore the ceasefire. In that connection, we therefore fully support the draft resolution which has just been introduced by the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, as it stands.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation is gravely concerned at the sudden escalation in the Gaza Strip. We believe that it is necessary to bring an immediate end to Israel's wide-scale use of force against the Gaza Strip, which has already led to great losses and suffering among the Palestinian civilian population. Clearly, the current conditions in Gaza make it virtually impossible to avoid such casualties.

At the same time, we again urge Hamas to immediately end the firing of rockets into the territory of Israel.

On 28 December, the members of the Security Council clearly stated that they favoured an immediate end to all military action in Gaza. Unfortunately, the parties have yet to heed their call. We insist that they must do so without further delay. We are certain that the key task today is to put an end to armed confrontation and to restore calm on both sides. That is an essential condition for saving lives and ensuring the safety and security of Palestinians and Israelis alike and for preventing a humanitarian catastrophe and destabilization throughout the Middle East, which would hold unpredictable consequences for international security.

It is time to put an end at long last to the Israeli blockade of Gaza. Scattered ad hoc measures will not bring that about. All parties must fully comply with international humanitarian law. As a matter of urgency, humanitarian corridors must be opened and allowed to operate safely to enable unimpeded passage out of Gaza by civilians, as well as by foreigners, including Russian citizens. This would also help in the

immediate evacuation of the sick and wounded from the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli and Palestinian parties must immediately resume full and unconditional implementation of their obligations under the Road Map for a Middle East peace settlement, including putting an end to settlement activity and effectively fighting terrorism. Here, it is key to resume efforts towards a just and comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian problem, to ensure adequate security for Israel and, in the broader sense, to bring about a comprehensive and lasting peace between the Israelis and Arabs.

There is an ever more urgent need for inter-Palestinian reconciliation, based on the well-known principles laid down by the Quartet of key international mediators. That was the thrust of resolution 1850 (2008), recently adopted by the Security Council. We hope that, guided by that important decision of the principal organ bearing responsibility for international peace and security, the parties will demonstrate political will and a sense of responsibility for the future of the region and that they will put an immediate end to violence and genuinely move forward towards an Israeli-Palestinian settlement, with a coordinating role played by the Quartet.

Russia will continue actively to encourage the attainment of that objective. There is no alternative for the sake of peace in the Middle East.

We shall study the draft resolution submitted to the Security Council by the delegation of Libya.

Sir John Sawers (United Kingdom): I too welcome the presence of the Secretary-General at today's meeting.

The situation in Gaza is of grave concern to my Government, as it is to the entire international community. My Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have been in regular contact with the Government of Israel, with the Palestinian Authority and with partners in the Arab world. And, as my French colleague noted, European Union foreign ministers met yesterday and set out the steps that we in the European Union believe need to be taken to address this crisis.

One thing is clear: it has to be brought quickly to an end. The cost in terms of civilian lives is simply unacceptable. To achieve that we need to see four steps.

We need to see an immediate and permanent ceasefire. Hamas must ensure a complete and unconditional end to the rocket attacks into Israel that triggered this crisis. And Israel must cease its military strikes, which have continued for too long and which have caused many civilian casualties.

Secondly, we need urgent action to restore supplies of food, fuel and medicine to the population of the Gaza Strip. That means opening up the crossings into Gaza to allow the entry of those supplies, and it means ensuring that the supplies can be distributed properly within the Gaza Strip. Israel must meet its humanitarian obligations, and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East will, as always, have a vital role to play and will almost certainly need more support.

Thirdly, we need to see the crossings into Gaza reopen on a sustainable basis. The European Union stands ready to help in that effort, as it did after the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access. Alongside the reopening of the legitimate crossings, there must also be action to clamp down on the illegal smuggling trade across the Egypt-Gaza border, which militants have exploited to bring more weapons into Gaza. There must also be a new effort towards Palestinian reconciliation under the leadership of President Abbas. We believe that steps along those line will contribute to a durable ceasefire.

And fourthly, the parties and the entire international community must reinvigorate the collective efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East. Resolution 1850 (2008), which the Council adopted only a few weeks ago, mapped the way forward. It highlighted the importance of both the Annapolis process and the Arab Peace Initiative. We need a comprehensive approach, aimed at a two-State solution, which allows a secure Israel and a viable Palestinian State to live side by side in peace and security.

The current crisis is yet another reminder that there can be no military solution to the problems of the Middle East. The only way forward is through a political solution based on that common vision.

The Security Council has an important role to play in setting out the steps that need to be taken by the parties and in giving authority to a durable ceasefire. We will study the draft resolution circulated by our Libyan colleagues on behalf of the Arab Group. For a

resolution of the Security Council to secure broad support, it will need to reflect the responsibilities of all the parties and contribute to a durable ceasefire. The United Kingdom will work for agreement along those lines.

Mr. Terzi di Sant'Agata (Italy): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting and to thank the Secretary-General for the important statement he made.

My country is extremely concerned about the situation in the Gaza Strip and the ongoing military operations, as well as about the uninterrupted launching of rockets deep into Israeli territory. In deploring the heavy loss of life and the destruction of civilian infrastructure, we have to stress that the six-month truce between Israel and Hamas ended with the firing of Qassam rockets from the Gaza Strip, which we condemn without reservation. We call for the immediate cessation of those attacks against unarmed Israelis.

We also urge the Israeli Government, in the exercise of its right to self-defence, to guarantee the utmost restraint and moderation in its military operations. It is deplorable that, in a heavily populated area, innocent civilians were involved and that attacks caused the loss of civilian lives.

It is important that violence end on all sides. We must urge all parties to agree to a ceasefire. Consequences at the regional level could be extremely dangerous. It is essential that unity among the Palestinians be restored. Mediation between Palestinian factions is crucial and should not be abandoned, despite the current difficult situation.

There is an urgent need to relaunch the political process that was started in Annapolis one year ago; resolution 1850 (2008) sends a key message in that regard. There is no going back. The Arab Peace Initiative continues also to be a main point of reference for the peace process.

The most urgent objective that the international community must set out to achieve is an immediate ceasefire. This should be flanked, just as urgently, by immediate humanitarian aid to the Palestinian civilians living in the Gaza Strip. We take positive note of the efforts mentioned by the Secretary-General, by which the Israeli authorities, in cooperation with the United Nations, have today allowed 84 trucks with essential deliveries to enter the Strip. But more needs to be done. We commend the work and dedication of United Nations humanitarian agencies and personnel, especially the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

It is my Government's belief that the Security Council should again address this situation, taking into full account the position expressed by the European Union foreign ministers yesterday in Paris. The following elements should, in particular, be considered.

First is the call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire based on an unconditional halt to rocket attacks by Hamas on Israel and an end to Israeli military action.

Secondly, there must be an immediate resumption of humanitarian aid through the reopening of all crossing points and their lasting and normal operation, as provided for by the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access. On this, consideration could also be given to an international observation mechanism to guarantee the cessation of hostilities and unhindered access for humanitarian aid.

Thirdly, the Security Council should also urge the parties to intensify their efforts to advance the peace process, as demanded by resolution 1850 (2008).

And fourthly, Palestinian reconciliation and reunification, under the legitimate Palestinian Authority, will remain a key element.

Mr. Bui The Giang (Viet Nam): We thank you, Mr. President, for convening this urgent meeting. We also thank the Secretary-General for his presence and for his statement.

My delegation is following with grave concern and great regret the current dire situation in the Gaza Strip, where unjustifiable violence and attacks against both the Palestinian and the Israeli civilian populations have mounted to unacceptable levels over the past few days. We reiterate our condemnation of the indiscriminate attacks against civilians.

While recognizing Israel's need for self-defence against terrorist attacks, we denounce the excessive and disproportionate use of force by Israel, in collective punishment of the population in Gaza, which has resulted in the death or injury of hundreds of Palestinians, including women and children, and

widespread destruction of local property and infrastructure.

At the same time, we are profoundly dismayed at the inevitable prospect of exacerbation of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and its redoubled collateral impact on more than 1.5 Palestinians there if the Israeli military operations continue in the coming days.

Strongly convinced that there can be no military solution to the conflict, my delegation urges the parties concerned to immediately and unconditionally stop all acts of violence. We demand that Israel open all border crossings to allow for the urgent delivery of food, medical aid and fuel to Gazans, the evacuation of the injured and unhindered access for humanitarian workers.

We commend the United Nations agencies, including first of all the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and other humanitarian organizations for their work in difficult conditions on the ground, and call upon them to extend further emergency assistance to civilian populations in Gaza.

We welcome the joint efforts by the Palestinian Authority, Egypt and Jordan to strengthen inter-Palestinian political dialogue and reconciliation. We reconfirm our support for the important role played by the Quartet, the League of Arab States and regional countries in brokering a truce between the parties concerned and restoring calm to Gaza.

We believe it is imperative for the Security Council now to adopt an enforceable resolution that can help stop the killing of innocent people, prevent the situation from further risky escalation and bring the peace process back to the direction set out in the Road Map, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Annapolis joint understanding and the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 1850 (2008).

In this context, our appreciation goes to the Libyan delegation for preparing a draft resolution, which we commit ourselves to studying carefully and working actively and constructively on with other Council members towards its early adoption.

Mr. Khalilzad (United States of America): I too welcome the presence of the Secretary-General.

The United States is deeply concerned by the continuing violence in Gaza and southern Israel. We support an immediate ceasefire that is sustainable and implemented by all. Specifically, this means that Hamas must stop its rocket attacks. There cannot be a meaningful ceasefire without this step or without the end of illegal arms smuggling into Gaza.

We have not yet seen any evidence that Hamas is willing to immediately cease rocket attacks. The decision by Hamas to break the Egyptian-brokered period of calm — a decision, by the way, that was announced immediately following the adoption of Security Council resolution 1850 (2008) — led to renewed rocket attacks into southern Israel from Gaza. Knowing that it was intolerable for Israel to live under the terror of rocket attacks, Hamas continued its barrage, which involved dozens of rockets a day. As a result, we face the crisis we are meeting about today.

The United States deeply regrets the loss of innocent lives and the growing humanitarian difficulties in the area. We need to address all humanitarian suffering on an urgent basis. A ceasefire will clearly help with this objective. To attain these crucial results, my Government has been engaged in intensive efforts with Governments in the region and around the world to restore calm. These intensive efforts continue and will not cease until calm is restored.

We are faced with an extremely complex situation that cannot be resolved by simple and one-sided declarations or unbalanced initiatives. We welcome the concrete efforts made by the legitimate Palestinian Authority, the Government of Egypt, the European Union, the Arab League and other groups to contribute to a viable solution. For our part, we are working incessantly to achieve the following urgent objectives: first, an enduring ceasefire that is respected by all parties; secondly, an end to smuggling of weapons into Gaza; thirdly, increased transit of humanitarian goods to aid Palestinian people; and, fourthly, the opening of the crossings, with appropriate and legitimate Authority control.

We call on all to join us by working for those concrete objectives. Beyond that, as the Quartet stated in the most recent statement, a lasting peace will be reached through simultaneous and mutually reinforcing efforts on three tracks: negotiations; building the institutions of a Palestinian State; and implementation

of the parties' obligations under the Road Map, leading to the two-State solution — Israel and Palestine. We are committed to resuming efforts towards the establishment of that lasting peace.

Mr. Zhang Yesui (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation thanks you, Mr. President, for having convened this emergency meeting of the Security Council. We would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

China is seriously concerned by the large-scale Israeli air attacks against Gaza that have taken place since 27 December, which have caused an escalation of the tension in Gaza. We strongly condemn all actions that have caused casualties among civilians. In the early morning hours of Sunday, 28 December, the Security Council adopted a statement by the President to the press. We note with regret that the appeal made by the Council in its press statement by the President has not been heeded.

We urge Israel to immediately halt its military activities. Palestinian armed factions should also cease their launching of rockets. The parties concerned should, with the support of the international community, re-establish the ceasefire as soon as possible.

The Israeli air attacks have further exacerbated the already dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. We urge Israel to immediately open all border crossings into Gaza to facilitate unhindered access to Gaza for humanitarian relief materials. The Chinese Government has decided to provide the Palestinian National Authority with $1 million in emergency humanitarian assistance so that they can acquire essential materials.

We call upon the international community to take effective actions to alleviate the difficult humanitarian situation in Gaza, and we support urgent action by the United Nations in that area.

Two weeks ago in this Chamber, the Security Council adopted resolution 1850 (2008), reaffirming the determination of the international community to promote the peace process in the Middle East. In the current circumstances, the Security Council should take action to ensure that the objectives of that resolution are attained.

We have taken note of the fact that Libya has introduced a draft resolution, and we hope that all parties concerned can, on the basis of consultations, reach consensus on the draft resolution as soon as possible.

We hope that the Middle East Quartet will intensify its efforts and exert its influence. The international community and other partners should also play a constructive role. We hope that, with the joint efforts of the international community, military action can be halted as soon as possible and that the situation can be eased, so that all parties concerned can return to the negotiation table as soon as possible.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, we thank you for having convened this emergency meeting, which gives the Security Council an opportunity to consider the tragic events that are currently taking place in Gaza. The presence of the Secretary-General, which we welcome, clearly attests to the importance and urgency of the situation.

We condemn the use of force by anyone on either side. We regret the great loss of life in the current crisis, including among civilians, that has resulted from Israel's disproportionate military operations in Gaza. We call upon Israel to comply with international conventions, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. We also cannot condone the repeated firing of rockets by Hamas, which endangers the lives of both Israeli and Palestinian civilians. My delegation calls for an immediate ceasefire in order to avert an escalation that could engulf the entire region, as well as to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance, especially in order to evacuate the wounded.

By adopting resolution 1850 (2008), on 16 December, the Security Council called on the parties to honour their commitments under the Road Map, the Arab Peace Initiative and the relative resolutions of the Council. In line with those very commitments, we call on the parties to abandon the military option and to choose the path of dialogue, for violence will in fact only delay the prospects for peace in the Middle East.

Despite Israel's withdrawal from the territory, Gaza is among the key issues recently focusing attention on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In that regard, 2008 will go down as a year of great suffering for the people of Gaza; but it will also be one of great tragedy for the people of southern Israel, who have lived with the anxiety caused by indiscriminate firing

of rockets. The current crisis therefore entails a number of security concerns, which above all fall within the responsibility of the Security Council. How can the security of Israel, which is under threat from rocket launches from Gaza, be ensured? How can the Palestinian population be protected from Israel's military incursions and repeated embargos? How can emergency humanitarian assistance for the people of Gaza be ensured today? Those are the great current challenges that the Security Council must address.

At the same time, pending a comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is important that the Security Council agree on the answers to those questions. That is especially so given that reality on the ground calls for immediate action. That includes the urgent need for Israel to open border crossings to humanitarian assistance, and in particular to allow access for humanitarian workers and the delivery of assistance by a number of States. The international community, including the League of Arab States, has a duty to continue to help the parties to find a solution to the current crisis and, in general, to work to bring about a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We have just received the draft resolution that has been introduced by Libya. We shall consider it in due course.

Mr. Urbina (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by welcoming the presence among us of the Secretary-General, whose statement we very much appreciate. We have also listened very carefully to the statements made by the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel. We thank them both for their interventions.

Costa Rica would like to express its appreciation for the convening of this meeting in the light of the gravity of the current situation in the Middle East, especially in Gaza and southern Israel. We believe that the urgency of the reality on the ground required the immediate holding of a public meeting of the Council and calls for a firm response by this organ. We hope that the Council will take relevant action that will be respected by the parties.

Costa Rica agrees with the judgement of the Secretary-General that Israel's military activities in the Gaza Strip have been disproportionate. Those activities have resulted in the death of more than 350 persons, including a significant number of civilians. As we have said before, legitimate self-defence does not sanction reprisals such as those carried out by Israel in its attacks of recent days and its months-long blockade against the Palestinian civilian population, which has resulted in shortages, hunger and economic collapse.

We understand Israel's security concerns. In that regard, Costa Rica has repeatedly condemned, as it does today, the terrorist attacks against southern Israel. However, apart from that tragic situation, we urge avoiding the temptation to engage in an argument about who began this new descent into madness. Such a pointless undertaking leads only to the point of departure, while the number of dead and wounded continues to mount. Israel and Palestine should not be a proving ground for intellectual preferences or political games. For more than half a century, the lands of Israel and Palestine have called for a reaffirmation of the principles upon which the United Nations was founded, as well as the implementation of policies that neither ignore nor contravene those principles. Justice and Israel's security should not be incompatible goals.

As always, the question today is how to halt the current escalation of violence that is undermining every hope to see two States living side by side in peace, while furthering the well-being of their peoples. No one is blind to what a solution to the Middle East conflict requires. No one denies that there will be no solution and no peace so long as the occupation continues and international law is not respected, including international conventions and the resolutions of the Council. It seems to us important to reiterate that, given what is currently happening in the Middle East, the Council cannot remain indifferent and still be relevant.

It is also necessary to reiterate that there is a need to respect the Rome Statute and the relevant Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions, so as to ensure the protection of civilians and civilian goods. The parties to the conflict must always make a distinction between civilians and combatants and between civilian goods and military goals. Along the same lines, we believe that attacks on both Israeli and Palestinian territory are equally to be condemned.

As we have said before, we are concerned about the recourse to collective punishment as a response, for it violates international law under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Today, Costa Rica calls for a ceasefire that will lead to a permanent cessation of hostilities. We believe that the Council must, as a priority, ensure fulfilment of the parties' obligations under the Road Map, the relevant Council resolutions and international law. Our delegation is committed to working on the basis of the proposal submitted to us. We would like to see it improved so that it can receive broad support, and we will strive to achieve an unequivocal statement by the Council.

Mrs. Detaille (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this emergency public meeting of the Security Council, and I thank the Secretary-General for his presence.

Belgium is extremely concerned at the unprecedented escalation of violence in Gaza and southern Israel. It is a serious threat to regional stability, having already caused hundreds of deaths, and is accompanied by a grave humanitarian crisis linked to the specific context caused by the blockade of Gaza in recent months.

Belgium condemns the breaking of the truce by Hamas and the resumption of rocket attacks on southern Israel. Belgium recalls that Israel's right to defend itself does not give it the right to respond disproportionately and without regard for the effects of its actions on civilian populations.

In any event, neither of the parties has anything to gain from the current escalation. There is no possible military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, either in Gaza or anywhere else. That is why Belgium, together with the entire European Union, calls on the two parties to display responsibility towards the civilian populations concerned by undertaking a full and immediate ceasefire.

We also call for the normal and permanent reopening of all crossings into Gaza, as envisaged in the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access. Both parties must allow and facilitate immediate humanitarian action by permitting the urgent provision of food and medical aid, fuel and electricity to Gaza as well as the evacuation of the wounded and unhindered access for humanitarian workers.

Finally, Belgium calls for an intensification of the peace process, as requested in Security Council resolution 1850 (2008), so as to attain, in accordance with the Annapolis process, the objective recognized by all: the establishment of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel in peace and security. We must work to find a comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict based on elements including the Arab Peace Initiative. We also encourage inter-Palestinian reconciliation and support mediation efforts to that end.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Croatia.

My Government shares the sense of urgency and utmost concern regarding the ongoing violence in southern Israel and Gaza, in particular its heavy toll on civilians. We deeply regret the loss of civilian life. Our sympathies go to the families of innocent victims on both sides.

We join in the appeals made by the Council on 28 December 2008 and by the international community at large for all violence to be immediately brought to a halt, as it is only through peaceful means that we can hope to achieve a just and lasting peace. We urge the parties to adhere strictly to international humanitarian law. It is essential to avoid further civilian casualties, as any life lost is one too many. In that regard, we should not forget that the tenets of humanitarian law — notably the duty to protect civilians — apply to all.

Croatia is deeply concerned at the desperate situation of Gaza's civilians and hopes to see swift humanitarian action on the ground, including deliveries of humanitarian supplies, unhindered humanitarian access and the facilitation of the evacuation of injured persons. We appreciate the efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and other United Nations agencies, as well as the initiative by the Government of France, in that regard.

However, we cannot address the situation in Gaza — including the latest military actions of the Israel Defense Forces — in isolation from its context. Hamas and the militants in the Gaza Strip, positioned in and among the civilian infrastructure, have since been consistently carrying out rocket attacks on Israel. The terrible daily rocket attacks that Hamas is launching at the population of south Israel have increased in frequency as well as in range in recent days. Israel cannot be denied its inherent and legitimate right to defend itself or its obligation to defend and protect its citizens. However, civilian casualties must be avoided.

We do not condone violence, and we continue to believe in peace. Only two weeks ago, the Security Council sent out a strong message of support for the Annapolis peace process. It is essential that we stand firmly behind the messages contained in resolution 1850 (2008), which lay the groundwork for a political settlement and a continuation of the process. This calls for responsibility on the part of all actors, notably those in the region. We will continue to support every constructive effort aimed at curbing the violence.

We shall study very carefully the draft resolution circulated by the Libyan delegation.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I now call on the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, and the other members of the Security Council for rapidly responding to the request of the Group of Arab States that this emergency meeting be convened. We are grateful to the Secretary-General for attending this emergency meeting, which is being held to consider the recent and ongoing Israeli military actions against the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip. To date, this aggression has killed more than 400 Palestinians and wounded thousands of others, including many women and children, and the horrifying carnage continues. The impact has been made still more tragic by the crippling blockade imposed by Israel, in flagrant violation of its responsibilities under international law and international humanitarian law, including its specific obligations, as the occupying Power, under the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

The events in Gaza, including Israel's premeditated and barbaric aggression and killing of civilians and its disproportionate and arbitrary use of force, threaten peace and security not only in the Middle East region, but throughout the world. That requires the Security Council to step up its efforts and take immediate action, in accordance with its Charter mandate, to ensure a comprehensive and binding ceasefire that will be respected.

Such action by the Council would implement its unanimous will, as expressed in the press statement of 28 December 2008, which called for an immediate end to all military action and violence and for efforts to address the humanitarian situation and the urgent humanitarian needs in the Gaza Strip through the permanent reopening of the crossings, in order to bring about improved political, economic and humanitarian conditions.

Such conditions are necessary if there is to be an end to violence and counter-violence and true calm between the parties, so that international efforts can be stepped up to bring about the desired settlement and to establish an independent Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, as quickly as possible.

There can be no doubt that Israel is not heeding the appeals by the Security Council to address the explosive situation in Gaza. Israel continues its military aggression, flagrantly flouting the will of the international community despite the Council's repeated calls to both parties, the calls by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and contacts with the concerned parties. Israel's actions have exacerbated tensions in the occupied Palestinian territories and, indeed, in all Arab countries. This will compromise the prospects for peace in the Middle East.

The Security Council, which, through its successive resolutions and decisions, has recently stated its intent to bring about peace, needs to impose its collective will under international law and international humanitarian law by adopting a decisive resolution that would include the elements already set out in the press statement, along with other elements. Specifically, it should highlight the need to ensure the international protection necessary for the Palestinian people in order to restore the prestige and credibility of the Security Council by addressing this aggression, avoiding double standards, politicization and selectivity.

The Israeli aggression, which has been denounced by all international and regional parties, requires that the Security Council adopt a firm decision and take all measures necessary to end Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip and to prevent a land attack from taking place. Contrary to Israeli assertions, these attacks are not carried out in self-defence. The attacks are taking place in the context of a lack of any real political will to put an end to the occupation and to enable the Palestinian people to restore their lost rights, specifically their inalienable right to self-determination and to the creation of their own independent State.

Notwithstanding all the efforts undertaken by the forces of peace in the region, including Egypt, to maintain the lull, this lull is not an end in itself, but a way to ensure an environment conducive to true peace instead of the suspended peace process, in which the Palestinian people and all Arab peoples have lost their faith. To truly guarantee that the situation will not be replicated, there must be an end to the occupation of the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories, a return to the borders of 4 June 1967, a settlement of the refugee question and the establishment of an independent, viable Palestinian State — which are all elements of the Arab Peace Initiative. That Initiative continues to be the only basis for bringing about a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

As a result, the Council of the Arab League, which met at the foreign minister level today, 31 December 2008, decided to instruct the Arab Group in New York to call for an emergency meeting of the Security Council and to call for a binding resolution to compel Israel to immediately end its aggression, lift the blockade, open the crossings, put an end to its collective punishment policy, ensure international protection for the Palestinian people and calm the situation.

I endorse the statement made by the Permanent Representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya as the sole member of the Arab Group represented in the Security Council and welcome his introduction of the draft resolution. We reiterate the fact that the draft resolution submitted to the Security Council represents an integrated, complete basis for addressing these issues in order to bring about an end to military confrontation and to promote peace efforts. The Arab Group hopes that all Council members will support the draft resolution and that it will be adopted as soon as possible.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Yahya Mahmassani.

Mr. Mahmassani (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me first to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting of the Security Council so speedily. Allow me also to welcome the presence of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and to thank him for his statement.

Since 27 December 2008, Israeli war planes have been continuously raiding the Gaza Strip. This has led to more than 2,000 casualties, many of whom are women and children. Furthermore, buildings, including homes, schools and mosques, are being destroyed with people inside them.

This past Saturday, the Security Council held an urgent meeting. An understanding was reached by the Council, expressed in a statement on Sunday morning. Since then, we have continued to call for a ceasefire, the opening of crossings to Gaza, the meeting of the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people and the protection of civilians.

Israel, at this very moment, continues to perpetrate its aggression, an aggression that comes on the heels of more than 18 months of a suffocating siege against Gaza, during which Israel prevented any medical or other essential supplies from reaching Gaza. This is a flagrant breach of international humanitarian law. It represents a policy of collective punishment, and it has been followed up by a policy of collective killing of the Palestinian people.

The continuing deterioration of the situation in Gaza serves no one's interests. It will have serious consequences and will result in more extremism and violence in the region. There will be less of an opportunity to reach a just and comprehensive peace.

The Council of the League of Arab States has taken up this grave situation at the ministerial level. It took a decision today strongly condemning Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip, demanding that Israel instantly cease all military activities in the area and condemning Israel for its blockade against the Palestinian people in Gaza, which has led to a grave deterioration of the humanitarian situation. Israel is directly responsible for this situation and is called upon to put an end to it.

The Council of the Arab League also stressed the need to continue to provide urgent humanitarian assistance to the Gaza Strip and support to international humanitarian organizations. We appeal to those organizations to shoulder their responsibilities vis-à-vis Palestinian civilians in Gaza in the light of Israeli violations of international humanitarian law. We call on the high contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to convene a meeting of the parties to ensure the implementation of their decisions of 2001 and of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

The Security Council is called upon today to take the necessary measures to compel Israel to instantly cease all military activities in the Gaza Strip and allow the entry of humanitarian assistance to Gaza. The Council is also called upon to shoulder its responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security and to ensure the humanitarian protection of the Palestinian people.

How can the Security Council condone the daily killing of hundreds of people? How can it remain silent while Israeli raids are killing human beings and destroying buildings? Where is the international community? The Security Council has a responsibility. The credibility of the international community is about to dissolve as a barrage of ammunition continues to strike the Gaza Strip.

The President: There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 8.45 p.m.